

1426-1446 East Baltimore Street (Commercial
Buildings)
Baltimore (Independent City)
Maryland

HABS No. MD-904

HABS
MD,
4-BALT,
153-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REIGON, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
1426-1446 EAST BALTIMORE STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

HABS No. MD-904

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MD,
4-BALT,
153-

Location: 1426 - 1446 East Baltimore Street
Baltimore
Independent City
Maryland

Present Owner: Baltimore City

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of
Significance: The 1400 Block of Baltimore Street is a group
of late 19th century commercial buildings
which contribute to an historic streetscape.
They are part of the commercial development
of the Washington Hill area, 1860-1880's.

Descriptions and floor plans of individual structures
are filed under HABS No. MD-904-A through HABS No. MD-904-J.

Washington Hill, the area in which the 1400 block of East Baltimore Street is located, lies just north of Fells Point and covers twenty-seven blocks which extend from Central Avenue eastward to Washington Street and from Lombard Street north to Fayette Street. Named after the Washington Medical College which once stood on the site of the Church Home and Hospital, the history of the area is closely linked to its most famous neighbor to the south, Fells Point. With its deep water harbor and its busy ship building trade, Fells Point had become an important East Coast port before 1750. Because it could accomodate ships unable to navigate the shallow waters of the Baltimore Town Basin, Fells Point for a while threatened to eclipse its rival port to the west. As a result, land speculators, anxious to hedge their bets, bought property surrounding both places. By the mid-eighteenth century, when businesses and residences began to spread northward from the Fells Point waterfront, all the land north to the present day Orleans Street had been aquired and named. Three tracts of land - Mountenay's Neck, Carter's Delight and Kemp's Addition - divided the areanow known as Washington Hill.

In 1773, when Fells Point and Baltimore Town were incorporated into Baltimore City, Harford Run presented a barrier between the two ports. It flowed south along what is now Central Avenue, and constant flooding created a wide swampy area that made transportation difficult and increased the threat of disease, particularly yellow fever. The only possible crossings were at Wilks Street causeway (Eastern Avenue) and the Dulaney Street bridge (Baltimore Street). Between 1799 and 1812 the city walled in the Run, drained the swamps, and constructed a bridge across Fayette Street. As the city acted to unite the two business centers, Fells Point continued to grow and Washington Hill began to develop as both a business and residential community. Merchants serving the seaman who visited the port opened businesses not only along the waterfront but northward up Market Street (Broadway). Some of the boarding houses which accomodated sailors in the early 1800's still stand in the neighborhood.

The expansion of the Fells Point harbor area, which was located south of Washington Hill, accounted for the first stages of development of the area. After William Fell built a shipyard near the harbor, other shipbuilders were attracted to the area. As a port, Fells Point was booming by 1745. The Point's commercial importance influenced wealthy and aristocratic families to build homes in the area.

As its reputation as a shipbuilding center and repair dock increased, Fells Point developed business and institutions to serve men who came ashore while their ships were refitted or

repaired. Taverns, dance halls, boarding houses, churches and meeting halls sprang up. Presently the National Maritime Union Hiring Hall located at Broadway and Fairmount in Washington Hill perpetuates the influence of seamen in this area.

The shipbuilding influence is also found in the width of Broadway. Once known as Market Street, it ran on either side of a ropewalk which extended for several blocks. The ropewalk was a single storey structure in which the great ropes used in shipping were twisted. Located south of Washington Hill, this structure was removed after the shipping industry declined. The street remained wide, however, and became known as the broad way, thus, Broadway.

With the decline of Fells Point as a shipbuilding center after the War of 1812, immigrant families began moving into the old sailors' homes. After the area near the harbor developed, the immigrants moved into the upland areas and into what is now Washington Hill. The immigrants were of many nationalities, but it was the Poles who remained here. The area just north of the harbor and extending into the southern portion of Washington Hill developed into a largely Polish enclave within the city.

Washington Hill was not entirely settled though until the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1836 the Washington Medical College was described as surrounded by cornfields. As late as 1859, after the Church Home and Hospital had bought the Washington Medical College, the surrounding area was still largely undeveloped.

Not until the late 1800's were the hills to the east of the Church Home and Hospital developed into rowhouses. The houses were first occupied by Germans. Irish, Bohemian and Russian immigrants also settled in this area.

The older areas to the west, between Broadway and Fallsway, wherein the 1400 block of Baltimore Street lies, had already been occupied by a German-Jewish wave of immigrants around 1860 and by a Middle European wave of Jewish immigrants in the 1880's. Many of the Jews in the second wave had fled the Russian pogroms of the time. Most of the people settling in this area earned their living as small shopkeepers along the major streets - Baltimore, Lombard and Fayette Streets. Some worked as shoemakers and tailors in the sweatshops.

The Black population in Washington Hill was still small in the early 1900's. The blacks who lived in the area in the early 1900's were generally found in the inner block areas of Spring Street, Dallas Street and Bethel Street. Most of them had moved north to the big city following the Civil War.

The 1400 block of East Baltimore Street was part of the commercial development of the 1860's and 1880's. The buildings within this block all show evidence of having had shops below and residences above; an observation supported by available historic accounts of this area.

Bordering this block of buildings along Spring Street are many of the small houses (10' x 27') which were occupied by the Blacks who moved to Washington Hill following the Civil War.

The major shopping area serving Washington Hill in the 1900's was in the 1000 and 1100 blocks of East Lombard Street. Commonly known as the Jewish Corn Beef Belt, the area is located just west of Central Avenue and is still famous today.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Fox, Bernard R.; A History of Washington Hill and the Surrounding Area, Department of Housing and Community Development Staff Paper, Baltimore, Maryland, 1970.

Landon, Philip J.; Washington Hill. A Brief History, Brochure for Citizens of Washington Hill Inc., 2 South Broadway, Baltimore, Maryland, 1979.

Maryland Port Authority; Port of Baltimore, the Inner Harbor Comes Full Cycle, Maryland Port Authority, Baltimore, Maryland, 1970.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The 1400 Block of Baltimore Street is to be developed for the Baltimore Artists' Housing Development Corporation of Baltimore, Maryland, to 32 residential/studios for artists in the Baltimore community. Buildings 1426, 1428, 1440, 1442, 1444, and 1446 will be renovated within their existing shells. Buildings 1430, 1432, 1434, 1436 and 1438 are considerably damaged due to fire and exposure to the weather. These buildings will be rebuilt to the existing facades. The facades of all buildings on the block will be cleaned and repaired.

This project is being partially funded by Community Development Block Grant and Jobs Bill Funds.

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